

# Studies in Scottish Quakerism

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THE study of Scottish Quaker history owes much to Presbyterians. Rev. Dr. John Cunningham a century ago published a general history of Quakerism,<sup>1</sup> devoting a chapter to Robert Barclay the "Apologist" and making other references to Scotland—e.g., the "Quaker tournament" (debate) at Aberdeen in which Barclay participated. Rev. D. G. Barron in his edition of the Court Book of the Barony of Urie<sup>2</sup> gave some pages to the Barclay family and their Quaker beliefs and activities. Rev. Dr. Dugald Butler in 1913 issued a short account of "George Fox in Scotland",<sup>3</sup> appreciating him as a fellow mystic. Rev. J. Torrance, in a lecture to this Society in 1927 and in an article of 1936,<sup>4</sup> recounted the story of seventeenth century Scottish Friends in the South West and North East respectively. Dr. George Burnet, at the instance of Principal Hugh Watt, produced a Ph.D. thesis; the substance was later published as "the Story of Quakerism in Scotland",<sup>5</sup> to which I was privileged to add a supplementary chapter, covering the last century.

The material for the present paper was largely derived from my studies as a Fellow of the Quaker College of Woodbrooke, Birmingham (1964-5)—a Cadbury benefaction—rather a sinecure for the superannuated. It has been supplemented by an investigation of Scottish Quaker records<sup>6</sup> primarily undertaken in connection with a "demographic" study of Quaker records, projected by a Friend, Dr. David Eversley, now Lecturer in this new "discipline" at the new University of Sussex. Friends' records are in general well preserved, but for Scotland are defective for the later eighteenth century; this reflects the contemporary disorganisation. They are rather jejune, comprising mainly lists of births, marriages and deaths, Minutes of Meetings, financial statements, etc. There are few personal

<sup>1</sup> J. Cunningham, *The Quakers* (1886).

<sup>2</sup> D. G. Barron, *Baron Court of Urie* (Scottish History Society, 1892).

<sup>3</sup> D. Butler, *George Fox in Scotland* (1913).

<sup>4</sup> J. Torrance, "Quaker Movement in Scotland" (*Scottish Church History Society*, 1927); "Early Quakerism in N.E. Scotland" (*Banffshire Field Club*, 1936).

<sup>5</sup> G. B. Burnet, *Story of Quakerism in Scotland* (1952).

<sup>6</sup> cf. W. H. Marwick, "Scottish Quaker Records" (*Scottish Genealogical Society*, vii, 3, 1954).

documents, except for the seventeenth century, notably the Memoir of Alexander Jaffray of Aberdeen, edited and supplemented in the early nineteenth century by John Barclay, a descendant of the Apologist.<sup>1</sup> William F. Miller (1835-1918) made considerable study of then available records, out of which he produced a series of articles for *Friends' Historical Journal*; he also published reminiscences of his own and other Quaker families in Edinburgh in *Memorials of Hope Park*.<sup>2</sup> The columns of the *Friend*, founded 1843, and of *The British Friend*, published in Glasgow, 1843-91, provide additional information.

As professionally a student and teacher of economic history, I am more versed in, and here concerned with, the social rather than the theological and ecclesiastical aspects of Quakerism, though on Quaker principles there is no essential distinction between sacred and secular. The first exponents of Quakerism claimed it to be "primitive Christianity revived"; and its earlier historians, especially of its formative years, tended, like medieval monks, to hagiography.

The Society has always been small and weak in Scotland, for reasons analysed by Torrance and Burnet. It was fundamentally in conflict with the dominant Calvinist theology, though Robert Barclay in his "Apology" is usually held to have attempted some reconciliation. A fresh study of his thought is being made by Elton Trueblood, the American Quaker philosopher, who delivered a tercentenary lecture on him at the Yearly Meeting in Edinburgh in 1948. The Society of Friends, like other Non-conformist bodies, probably suffered by being originally an import from England, and that at the time of Cromwell's long-resented rule over Scotland. It had its early strength in the Aberdeen district, often regarded as the least Presbyterian area of Scotland. Membership (as in England) declined in the eighteenth century, and organisation broke down for a generation, and had to be revived by emissaries from England. In 1786, a "Half Yearly Meeting for North Britain" was established, subordinate to "London Yearly Meeting"; this in 1807 became the present "General Meeting for Scotland". Immigrants from England, such as the Wigham family, had a large part in the revival, and that is still the case. In the present century, membership has doubled, to well over 400, to some extent, however, by "convincements" of native Scots. As in Continental countries, members who have thus entered the Society predominate numerically.

The obverse of this trend is that the Society in Scotland lacks the

<sup>1</sup> J. Barclay, *Diary of Alex. Jaffray and Memoirs of Rise of Quakerism in North of Scotland* (1834).

<sup>2</sup> W. F. Miller, *Journal of Friends' Historical Society*, Vols. I-XIV, 1903-17, *passim*; *Memorials of Hope Park* (1886).

hereditary families who up to the present have had a large part south of the Border. The "old school tie" of Ackworth, Bootham and Leighton Park, has provided a sentimental attachment for some, with the now recognised weakness that it may lead to a merely nominal adhesion. Consequently the old-standing institution of "birthright membership" has now been discontinued. The few formerly prominent families, such as the Barclays, Millers and Ormistons of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Brantinghams, Cruickshanks, Glennys and Grays of the nineteenth, have become extinct or ceased to be members. Especially as the Evangelical movement affected the Society and approximated it to other Dissenters, members were lost to these—e.g., the Free Church and the Baptists; as in England to a larger extent—e.g., Gurneys, Hoares and Howards—to the Church of England.

Another factor has been the isolation of many members from the few Meetings, so that they have tended to associate with other religious bodies, occasionally acquiring a "dual" membership. The membership is now largely concentrated in Edinburgh and Glasgow, with well over a hundred in each. Dundee and Aberdeen have had a steady existence; elsewhere, Meetings have risen and fallen, depending largely on the presence and activity of a few individuals or families—e.g., Ayr, Hawick, Perth.

The sociological study of religious bodies—pioneered by Troeltsch and Weber—has been developed recently on a semi-Marxist basis by scholars such as Richard Niebuhr in U.S.A. and Brian Wilson in Great Britain. Elizabeth Isichei (an Australian married to a Japanese) has published some results of her study of nineteenth century Friends from this angle;<sup>1</sup> and further research is being pursued.

As was inevitable in seventeenth century economic conditions, most members were originally associated with the land. A few lairds were prominent in early days, such as the Barclays of Urie and the Burnets of Leys in the North East;<sup>2</sup> together with the so-called "Border Lairds" (ancestors of men of rather different note) Haig, Scott and Swinton. The last-mentioned was "disowned" for what Torrance calls a "moral lapse", though restored on repentance; John Barclay "improves the occasion" by reference to the sin of David and Bathsheba. The descendants in the main line of Robert Barclay, which became extinct in 1854 with the pedestrian athlete Robert Barclay-Allardice, were noted as agricultural "improvers". There was a farming community in the Kinmuck area,

<sup>1</sup> E. Allo Isichei, "From Sect to Denomination in English Quakerism" (*British Journal of Sociology*, 15 (1964), pp. 207-21.

<sup>2</sup> C. W. Barclay, *History of Barclay Family* (1924); G. Burnett, *Family of Burnett of Leys* (1901).



including the brothers Gray and the Cruickshanks, of whom Amos (1808-95) attained repute as a breeder of pedigree cattle.<sup>1</sup> This group dissolved later, mainly by immigration to U.S.A.—e.g., the Duguids—or England; a few Aberdeenshire Friends, notably George Smith, were leaders of the “Fritchley secession”, which in protest against mid-century abandonment of traditional usages formed a small independent Meeting in Derbyshire, but re-united in 1968.

Association with agriculture led some Friends into flour milling—an occupation always unpopular from Chaucer’s time; the share in corn dealing of the “villanous tribe of Quakers” was one of Cobbett’s chief grievances against them.<sup>2</sup> Less liable to censure were their activities as gardeners, for which Scots then attained renown; notable examples were Hew and James Wood of Hamilton, and the first William Miller, who became Royal Gardener at Holyrood; his descendants as seedsmen apparently found the basis of their later wealth as owners of the estate of Craigentenny.<sup>3</sup>

Even in the seventeenth century, some Friends engaged in trade, such as the Jaffrays, one of whom was Provost of Aberdeen, and the Skenes. A short anonymous novel gives an intimate picture of the family life of the former’s son.<sup>4</sup> The Ormistons, who were for generations the mainstay of the Kelso Meeting, were involved in trade with the Netherlands, and their founder was a partner in the company which made a Quaker settlement in New Jersey and in the Cumberland Quaker firm which established ironworks in the Highlands.<sup>5</sup> In the nineteenth century, Alexander Cruickshanks (1759-1842) had a hosiery business in Edinburgh, which survived until the 1930s; he is one of those credited with reviving the “fixed price system” in place of “higgling”, which some Friends pioneered in earlier days.

As manufacturing developed, some Scottish as well as English Friends became brewers—e.g., Thomas Areskine (or Erskine),<sup>6</sup> a chief founder of Edinburgh Meeting, and George Miller (1726-84) of the Craigentenny family, whose product was known as “Quaker Ale”. The Christies of Ormiston and Luncarty, of Aberdeenshire descent and Irish upbringing,

<sup>1</sup> I. M. Bruce, *History of Aberdeen Shorthorn Cattle* (1923).

<sup>2</sup> W. Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, p. 364.

<sup>3</sup> J. Smith, “Story of Craigentenny” (*Book of Old Edinburgh Club*, XXII, 1938).

<sup>4</sup> “M.E.”, *A Man of Plain Speech* (1897).

<sup>5</sup> T. Ormiston, *Ormistons of Teviotdale* (1951); A. Raistrick, *Quakers in Science and Industry* (1950).

<sup>6</sup> W. F. Miller, “Thomas Areskine” (*Journal of Friends’ Historical Society*, 1908).

were promoters of the bleaching industry. The woollen weaving of the Borders, especially its hosiery branch, had among its leaders the Wilsons, the Watsons and the Glennys; the connection was carried on till recently by the partnership of I. Gray Wallis in Innes Henderson of "Braemar" fame. The shawl-making, in which Edinburgh, in the Sciennes area, once vied with Paisley, was much in the hands of Quakers such as the Wighams. The manufacture of biscuits—associated elsewhere with the Quaker founders of Carr, Huntley & Palmer and Jacobs—had its Scottish representatives in the Grays of Gray Dunn of Glasgow. David Doull of Edinburgh was a Victorian confectioner. Stephen Wellstood, who "joined Friends" late in life was one of the first to introduce the manufacture of (American) stoves at Falkirk. James Fenwick of Perth was an umbrella manufacturer, while William and John C. White conducted a tobacco pipe factory in Glasgow. Robert Mason, manager of New Lanark Mills (d.1861), a Lancashire Roman Catholic by origin, continued Owen's original connection with Quaker partners.<sup>1</sup>

Even less than in England has the Society in Scotland appealed to the industrial worker. Among the few exceptions are John Yule (1839-1924), originally a miner, prominent in public life in Fife, who carried on a Meeting in his own house in Dunfermline, and William Cooper of Aberdeen, a joiner and Town Councillor from 1895.<sup>2</sup>

At the present day, Quakers are predominantly professional. James Henderson (1833-93) became an Inspector of Factories, as is the present "Clerk" of S.E. Scotland Monthly Meeting. Well-known names in medicine include Joseph Lister, Professor in Edinburgh and Glasgow (who left the Society on "marrying out"), John Theodore Cash (1854-1936), son-in-law of John Bright and Professor in Aberdeen, and Richard Ellis, till recently Professor of Child Health in Edinburgh. A disproportionate number are teachers; Edinburgh University has latterly averaged about a dozen (not all "well-concerned") on its staff. The best-known is John Macmurray, who, however (as explained in his "Swarthmore Lecture"),<sup>3</sup> did not "feel free" to join until his retirement. Friends seem to have an affinity with scientific studies and are well represented among F.R.S. and office-bearers of the British Association. Indeed, Ernest Ludlam, the virtual founder of the modern Edinburgh Meeting, and a Lecturer in Chemistry, claimed that Quakerism represented the scientific approach to religion. The last Clerk

<sup>1</sup> cf. W. H. Marwick, "Friends in 19th Century Scotland" (*Friends Historical Journal*, 1954).

<sup>2</sup> K. D. Buckley, *Trade Unionism in Aberdeen* (1955).

<sup>3</sup> J. Macmurray, *Search for Reality in Religion* (1965).

of Edinburgh "Preparative Meeting" was also a Lecturer in Chemistry; John Walton was Professor of Botany in Glasgow. Lewis Richardson, Principal of Paisley Technical College, and Kenneth Boulding, once on Edinburgh University Staff and now Professor of Economics in Michigan, are pioneers of the modern study of the "mathematics of conflict". A few—including two recent Clerks—have practised law or architecture. Friends, especially in Scotland, have not contributed much to art or literature; but William Miller (1796-1882), the last of his dynasty to be active in Edinburgh, was distinguished as an engraver, and Edward Walton (1860-1922), a "convinced" member, was R.S.A. and a member of the "Glasgow School". Robert Bird (1855-1929), a Glasgow solicitor, also "convinced", had a contemporary popularity as author of Biblical stories for children, a novel, and satirical verse.<sup>1</sup>

Membership, after a long decline, rose from 196 in 1885 to 459 in 1965 (189 in Edinburgh, 146 in Glasgow), despite "pruning" of nominal members and disuse of admission by "birthright". The composition has ranged widely. Of those whose deaths between 1863 and 1928 are recorded, five were commercial travellers, four clerks, three each grocers, biscuit manufacturers, mechanical engineers and cashiers, while there was one representative each of such divergent occupations as engine driver, joiner, gas stoker, shipyard worker, photographer, farmer, cabinetmaker, master builder, teacher, solicitor, architect and "gentleman".

Recent historians, such as Christopher Hill, have stressed the revolutionary features, religious and social, of the seventeenth century even more than those of the sixteenth. One illustration is the rise of Quakerism. Rufus Jones, the American historian of the Society, himself a mystic, emphasised the affinities of early Friends with the "spiritual reformers" of the Middle Ages and Reformation, with their social as well as religious heresies, suppressed and vilified by Catholic and Protestant alike.<sup>2</sup> No actual link has been demonstrated, and later writers regard Quakerism as originally an offshoot of English Puritanism, and insist on studying it in its "historic setting,, and appreciating its "faith and experience" in its own terms.<sup>3</sup> The modern study of Puritanism, inspired by Carlyle, and elaborated by writers such as Haller and Walzer,<sup>4</sup> dissociate it from its Victorian degeneracy into prudery and Pharisaism. Quakerism may thus

<sup>1</sup> R. Bird, *Jesus the Carpenter of Nazereth*, etc., Law Lyrics, Reversed on Appeal; cf. D. W. Brown, *Clydeside Litterateurs* (1897).

<sup>2</sup> cf. N. Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millenium* (1957); G. H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (1962).

<sup>3</sup> H. Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England* (1964).

<sup>4</sup> W. Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (1957); M. Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints* (1960).



be regarded as an extremer form of Puritanism, going further in its rejection of medieval doctrines and practices. Summing up recent debate, Frederick Tolles concludes: "The two conceptions of Quakerism as spiritual religion and as social radicalism . . . are merely differing emphases, mutually compatible, even complementary".<sup>1</sup> This may serve to introduce references to subsequent developments in Quaker thought and practice.

A favourite charge against early Quakers, popularised by Macaulay, was that of Jacobitism. Certainly William Penn and Robert Barclay had close associations with James VII and II; some of the former's activities have embarrassed his biographers, though Macaulay's chief libels have long been refuted. A rather unconvincing apologia has recently been offered by an American writer,<sup>2</sup> who represents James as a champion before his time of religious toleration. More substantially, Quaker beliefs in non-violence have been confused with extreme Tory rejection of resistance to Divine Right. Some notable Scottish Friends, including the first William Miller, Bartholemew Gibson, King's farrier, and George Swan, innkeeper, both of Glasgow, and May Drummond, sister of the famous Edinburgh Lord Provost, evinced rather platonic Jacobite sentiments. A concrete result of Stuart favour was the foundation of Quaker settlements in America; migration of members to Pennsylvania and the smaller Scottish colony in New Jersey,<sup>3</sup> of which Barclay was a founder, probably drew away active elements and contributed to the eighteenth century decline.

With the cessation of persecution after 1688, the Society, in the "Age of Quietism", tended to become an exclusive "separated sect", and the "testimonies" which had been adopted from profound spiritual conviction, became merely formal usages—*corruptio optimi pessima*. Despite the adoption of "birthright" membership, defined in 1737, numbers declined, partly through reluctance to admit, even more by readiness to "disown". ("Disownment" was not excommunication; no responsible Friend held that "ultra ecclesiam amicorum nulla salus"; it was merely deprivation of privileges of membership.) It was exercised for any breach of accepted practices; insolvency and sexual offences were the most frequent occasions, though apparently the gravest were "disorderly" marriage by a "priest" (a term extended to Presbyterian ministers) and "marrying out" to a non-member. The Quaker form of marriage by mutual vows before witnesses in a Meeting for Worship was valid under Scots Common Law; the regulations of the Act of 1939 involved difficulties. Meetings appoint a

<sup>1</sup> F. B. Tolles, 1652 in *History*; ap. A. Brinton, ed., *Then and Now* (1960).

<sup>2</sup> V. Buranelli, *King and Quaker* (1962).

<sup>3</sup> G. P. Insh, *Scottish Colonial Schemes* (1922).

Registering Officer, who does not "perform the ceremony" but is responsible for compliance with legal obligations.

As in England (though not in some parts of U.S.A.), the Scots adhered to George Fox's rejection of a "separated ministry"; and in this, as in other respects, recognised sex equality in the "priesthood of all believers". Women have not only predominated in numbers, but often in the vocal ministry (which Cunningham attributed to their being the "most excitable" section). Though eligible for all offices, they have not in practice held the most responsible, that of Clerk of General Meeting, and indeed, met separately from men in Meetings for Business until 1903; they have usually constituted a smaller proportion of "Elders".

The Evangelical Movement influenced the Society in Scotland as elsewhere in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and drew it closer to Nonconformity in England and Presbyterianism in Scotland. To this is probably due the acceptance of Total Abstinence and rejection of theatre-going, dancing and other "worldly" recreations, characteristic of Victorian Puritanism, against which there has been considerable reaction of late, illustrated in the greater "permissiveness" of revised "Advices and Queries", the participation of "well-concerned" Friends in amateur drama and the popularity of dancing at social gatherings of younger members. The disuse of titles among members and preference for "Christian" names has been generally maintained, though the current vogue of the latter, even in academic and Parliamentary circles, may be attributed to American rather than Quaker influence.

Friends' interest in the education of their children on Quaker lines was responsible for the existence of a school in Aberdeenshire in the eighteenth century; subsequently, Scottish Friends have had a share in the facilities and administration of the nearest English boarding school, at Wigton, in Cumberland. The Adult School movement, with which Friends were closely associated in England, has not flourished in Scotland. Friends were active in the few Scottish examples, Glasgow, Kilmarnock and Edinburgh, all now closed. Edinburgh Friends ran a Literary Society in the mid-nineteenth century. For some thirty years a Scottish conference has been held every spring, now usually at the Holiday Home at Bonskeid, Perthshire.

As already indicated, seventeenth century Friends were active in public life, notably Barclay, Swinton and Jaffray; but in the eighteenth century sought to be "quiet in the land". This abstention was rather reluctantly broken in the nineteenth century when some, such as John Bright, were drawn to support the political reform movement. John



Henderson (1797-1851), a cutler in Paisley, was involved in the abortive "Radical Rising" of 1820; he subsequently became editor of a reform journal and Provost of the burgh, being admitted to membership of the Society in 1837.<sup>1</sup> Walter Wilson of Hawick and Stephen Wellstood (1811-86) of Edinburgh were active in local Liberal politics. Early in the present century, Robert Bird championed Tariff Reform, while Robert Shanks was a Liberal Councillor and prospective candidate in Glasgow, who left the Liberal Party over the 1914 War and "joined Friends". He was founder of the Study Circle, a Christian pacifist and socialist group flourishing in the inter-war period. Its last Chairman, Thomas Taylor, also a "convinced" Friend, is now Chairman of the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society and a life peer. At least two members are in municipal life, as magistrate of East Kilbride and Chairman of Dundee Education Committee.

Friends are perhaps best known to the public from their relief work, especially in war. Edinburgh Friends interested themselves in Polish refugees after the rising of 1830, and contributed funds for distress in the Highlands in the famine of the 1840s and in Lancashire during the Civil War in the 1860s. Members served in the War Relief Missions in France and elsewhere in both World Wars, and a Quaker Overseas Relief Committee still aids post-war reconstruction—e.g., in Algeria.

Scottish Friends were prominent in the anti-slavery agitation, e.g., in the Glasgow Emancipation Society founded in 1833. In accordance with their belief in equality they were among the pioneers of Women's Suffrage; some of the Wigham family figured in a Female Emancipation Society of the mid-nineteenth century.

Among philanthropic efforts at home may be mentioned the Bible Class for girls conducted by Mary White and Agnes Bryson in Glasgow in the late nineteenth century, and James A. Braithwaite's similar work for both sexes in Dundee in the early twentieth. Eliza Wigham, the last survivor of the family in Edinburgh, was associated with a Women Workers' Society, Mothers' Meeting and Penny Bank in the Newington area of the city.<sup>2</sup>

A few Friends have advocated Scottish national independence in the political field and also in the government of the Society. As stated above, the Scottish Meetings have since 1786 been subordinate to London Yearly Meeting, and the Scottish General Meeting has been represented on central

<sup>1</sup> Jane S. Thompson, "A Paisley Provost" (*Friends' Quarterly*, 1924).

<sup>2</sup> J. Goodfellow, *The Print of His Shoe* (1906).

committees. A change in the constitution of the Society, transferring powers and representation to the lesser units of Monthly Meetings (comparable to Presbyteries) has occasioned difficulties, and the special position of the General Meeting as a national body, having relations with other Scottish religious and social organisations, has been specially recognised in the new regulations.

Finally, something may be said about ecumenical contacts. Friends "travelling in the ministry", especially those of Evangelical leanings, such as Deborah Derby (who influenced Rev. Dr. Henry Duncan of Ruthwell), Sarah Squire, who left a MSS. record of her tour of the Orkneys and Highlands (1835), and Richard Brockbank of Cumberland in the 1890s, had cordial relations with the Presbyterian clergy, though little permanent result accrued. Especially since Yearly Meeting was held, for the first and only time, in Edinburgh in 1948, when the use of the Assembly Hall was granted, invitations to address Church and other organisations have been frequent. Friends have collaborated in local and national inter-church activities, e.g., Christian Youth Assembly, Women's World Day of Prayer. They felt unable to accept an invitation to join the official Scottish Ecumenical Committee (1949) because of its insistence on the "Amsterdam credal basis", but individuals joined the voluntary Scottish Ecumenical Association and have participated in its gatherings. The recently founded Scottish Council of Churches has now unconditionally accepted the General Meeting into full membership.